DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 393 HE 020 483

TITLE Eliminating Sexism in the Classroom.
INSTITUTION Oregon State Univ., Corvallis.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Equal Education; Expectation; Higher Education; *Language Usage; *Sex Bias; *Sex Discrimination; Sex Stereotypes; *State Universities; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Oregon State University

ABSTRACT

Ways to eliminate sexism (discrimination based on sex) in Oregon State University classrooms are suggested, with attention to language, behavior, and expectations. Social outcomes of sexism are also identified. Unequal treatment singles out or ignores the individual. As a result, students may lose confidence, lower academic goals, or limit their career choices. Professors may transmit unexamined cultural assumptions that may include the belief that women are less intellectually committed and their work is less important than men's work. Women need access to the same employment and educational options available to men. Six suggestions for using language to provide a congenial atmosphere are offered, along with 11 suggestions for changes in faculty behavior, and 8 suggestions for raising faculty expectations of females, a step toward lending them more encouragement. Suggestions include: incorporate women and women's contributions into lectures; refer to students as "men and women" rather than "men and girls"; encourage women students when they seek to pursue nontraditional careers; call on women students as much as men students; and perceive students as individuals, rather than as men and women. (SW)

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Eliminating Sexism in the Classroom
Oregon State University

OUR COMMITMENT

Oregon State University recognizes its responsibility to be aware of racial and sexual prejudice in order to eliminate it from the classroom.

All of us each day attempt to implement the goal of eliminating sexism in the classroom. Our efforts won't eliminate all problems of sexism but will help our students to recognize their worth as individuals and to value each others' humanity.

This booklet suggests some additional ways in which we can eliminate sexism in the classrooms of Oregon State University.

CHANGING TIMES

It would be a mistake to believe that all or most sexism in the classroom is intentional. Professors, like other people, reflect and transmit unexamined cultural assumptions which may include the belief that women are less intellectually committed and their work is less important than men's work. This assumption is the result of different patterns of work roles for men and women in the past. The assumption rests on a belief that men's primary responsibility is the economic support of their families, and women's primary responsibility is the bearing and rearing of children and maintenance of the home. In fact, what may have been true in the past is not necessarily true today and certainly will not be true in the future.

Women accounted for three-fifths of the increase in the civilian work force during the last decade. Sixty-three percent of all women 18 to 64 years of age are employed outside the home or are looking for work. Multi-earner families now account for more than half of all married-couple families. In March 1984, 57 percent of wives were in the work force. All these working women must have access to the same employment and educational options available to men. Eliminating sexism in the classroom can help achieve this goal.

EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Sexism is discrimination based on sex. In the academic community, it means treating one sex differently from the other. Unequal treatment singles out or ignores the individual. As a result, students may lose confidence, lower their academic goals, or limit their career choices.

Sexism is often subtle and goes unnoticed. The man enrolled in Home Economics may be made to feel unwelcome. The woman in Engineering may be made to feel uncomfortable.

When we take time to recognize these students' courage and to show them our appreciation, it reassures students that changing with the times is acceptable.

LANGUAGE

Language may welcome students or may suggest an uncongenial atmosphere. Professors suggest a supportive environment by encouraging students to appreciate the changing work world. (1)

☐ Occasionally refer to executives as "she" and secretaries as "he."

☐ Suggest that "some women are very good in mathematics, just as some men are very good in mathematics," rather than "girls just aren't very good in mathematics."

☐ Refer to all students as "men and women," rather than as "men and girls."

☐ Avoid using humor that emphasizes women's weaknesses ("she can't make up her mind") or physical characteristics ("she may not be very smart, but she sure could win a beauty contest").

☐ Use generic terms such as "poet" rather than "poetess," "labor force" not "manpower," "chair" or "chairperson" not "chairman," and "first-year student" not "freshman."

☐ Incorporate women and women's contributions into lectures, rather than lecturing at length about men and men's contributions.

BEHAVIOR

Encourage a congenial atmosphere by using some of the following suggestions.

☐ Call on women students as frequently as you call on men students.

☐ Listen as attentively and respectfully to women students as to men students.

☐ Allow women to speak in class uninterrupted.

☐ Discourage men students from dominating class or group discussions and from interrupting women students.

☐ Prevent use of sexually suggestive slides.

☐ Give women equal opportunity to be classroom or laboratory asisistants and then give them as much responsiblity and authority as given to male classroom or laboratory assistants.

☐ Focus attention on women's academic or career goals rather than on their appearance or family status.

☐ Don't assume that students who visit a professor's office are making direct or indirect sexual overtures.

☐ Discourage students from harassing a student who may appear to be a "women's libber."

☐ Encourage women students when they seek to succeed in nontraditional careers.

☐ Remember that subtle differences in behavior towards women students can have a detrimental effect on their academic and career development. (1) (5)

EXPECTATIONS

Faculty sometimes have higher expectations of males and lend them more encouragement. (1)

☐ Encourage all students by suggesting that you have positive expectations about their academic performance.

☐ Encourage women to take difficult courses and fields of study.

☐ Assume women may wish to enter nontraditional as well as traditional fields.

☐ Coach women students as well as men students by asking for elaboration or further explanations.

☐ Assume women have the ability and desire to succeed.

☐ Expect women to be as competent and capable as men, whatever the subject.

☐ Assume women's academic goals are as serious as men's goals are.

☐ Perceive students as individuals, rather than as men and women.

SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF SEXISM

We have legitimate concerns that effects such as those documented below occur. Some of these outcomes we can do something about; others we can only recognize for their inequity.

☐ Men students are more frequently recommended for scholarships and awards than are women students. (1)

☐ Men are likely to be employed as engineers, architects, lawyers, judges, physicians, dentists, or college professors. Women are likely to be employed as nurses, health technicians, teachers (except college), librarians, and social workers. (2)

☐ Students are frequently counseled into stereotyped female and male careers. Two-thirds of all doctoral degrees earned by women, for example, are in library science, home economics, foreign languages, and education. (1) (2) (5) (6)

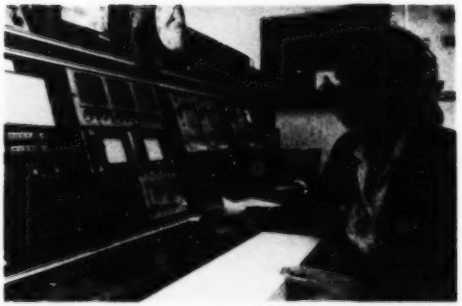
☐ Women students are more apt than men students to report "less confidence and limited career choices" as they progress through the educational system. (1) (5)

☐ A lower proportion of women college graduates than men pursue graduate or professional studies. Women earn 48 percent of all bachelor degrees but only 28 percent of all doctoral degrees. (2) (5) (6)

☐ Women students are more frequently interrupted by men students or professors than are men students. (1) (5)

☐ About 17 percent of American families are maintained by women; 47 percent of these families have incomes below the poverty level. Approximately 72 percent of black families living below the poverty level are families maintained by women. (3)

☐ Unless things change, a full-time working woman with a doctorate will earn in her lifetime, on the average, the same amount as a white man with a high school education. (2) (3)



☐ In 1981, 23 percent of women with a college education were clerical workers, compared to 12 percent in 1970. (2)

☐ Median earnings of full-year, full-time working women were $14,192 in 1983, compared to $22,410 earned by men. (2) (3)

☐ Women earn about 62 percent of what men earn—working full-time and year-round—even when they have the same education and experience levels. (3)

☐ Even when women's qualifications are in the same field, they earn considerably less than men. Women in electrical engineering, for example, earn up to $8,300 less than their male counterparts. (3)

☐ Women and children comprise 75 percent of the nation's 35 million poor. Women account for 71 percent of the 3.7 million elderly poor. Of the nearly 10 million families maintained by women, 35 percent live in poverty. More than one-half of all working women earn less than $10,000 annually. (3)

VOICES FROM OUR CAMPUS

Half my discussion group is men, and whenever I or any of the other women tries to speak or put in our ideas, we are drowned out by the men. This is the way it is in society. (4)

—Julia, first-year student

One of my professors constantly makes comments about how his wife asks him for money all the time and how his secretary keeps making mistakes. This just reinforces the idea that women are incompetent. (4)

—Jack, third-year student

My professor told us [girls] to excuse him while he talked to the men in the class. Then, he told them, "Remember, behind every successful man is a wife." The trouble was that half of the class was women and we [also] want to be successful. (4)

—Jane, fourth-year student

I was really nervous, but I asked the professor why he only talked about women as consumers or secretaries. He said, "Oh, no, we have one of those women libbers in here." I didn't open my mouth the rest of the term. (4)

—Ann, third-year student

Most of my professors talk in terms of he/his, never she/her, assigning texts only about men. They act like the men [students] are more intelligent than the women students. (4)

—Margaret, second-year student

INTROSPECTION

Thinking about the following may help each of us to identify areas for improvement or areas about which we can congratulate ourselves.

- ☐ Do I encourage women to achieve academically?
- ☐ Do I give equivalent class and advising time to women students as I do to men students?
- ☐ Do I direct as many questions, observations, and responses to women as to men?
- ☐ Do I see students first as individuals and only secondly as women and men?
- ☐ Have I perhaps unknowingly suggested that women's contributions in my field are of little consequence?
- ☐ In my classes, are women students interrupted more frequently than men students?
- ☐ Have I ever indicated that women might be more interested in food prices or personal relationships than in "tougher" aspects of my courses?
- ☐ Are women or research about women ever degraded?
- ☐ Do I assume that the study of man includes the study of woman?
- ☐ Are men or the progress of mankind emphasized, while women or contributions of womenkind are de-emphasized?
- ☐ Are such terms as "he, man, or mankind" frequently used, while "she, woman, and humankind" are rarely used?
- ☐ Do I ever make fun of such women's rights issues as comparable worth or marital rape?

OUR FUTURE

The Oregon State University faculty's commitment to ending sexism in the classroom will enhance academic excellence for all students.

This booklet reflects the concerns of the entire university, and is published by Oregon State University's Department of Women Studies, College of Liberal Arts, and Office of the President.

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Note: A more extensive bibliography is available upon request from the Department of Women Studies, ext. 2826, 3556, or 3661.

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